

Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER XXIV

Henry Hoerster,
Mason County



HENRY HOERSTER

By MYRTLE MURRAY
District Agent, Extension Service
College Station, Texas

SHORTLY before Christmas in 1845 a sailboat arrived in Galveston after a perilous voyage of eleven weeks from Germany. There the sturdy colonists transferred to another boat which would carry them to Indianola, or Carl's Haven. At last they were safely ashore in a new country. A strange mixture of loneliness and hopefulness enveloped them, loneliness for loved ones and friends who were probably preparing for the Christmas celebration at home in the old country. But they were hopeful for the promise of the future in a new land in which they could enjoy economic and political freedom.

Heinrich Hoerster and his wife, Christina Gehlhansen Hoerster, and their three little boys, Fritz, Dan and Anton, were in that group. The Hoerstes had been married seven years when they decided to come to Texas. With others they entered into contracts with *Verein Zum Schutz der deutschen Einwanderer in Texas*, or the "Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas." Henry and Christina Hoerster and their three little sons looked at the new country with awe and wonder, everything seemed favorable and the future appeared to be bright and promising.

While Henry Hoerster had the German's love of adventure in his heart and desire to see the new world, he also welcomed the opportunity of getting into a new country where he could make a better living and his boys could have a better opportunity. He had served in the German army. Because of high taxes, low wages and overpopulation his income from his efforts as a shoemaker was not sufficient, and now somewhere in Texas Henry Hoerster had a tract of three hundred and twenty acres of land that would actually be his as soon as he could live on it three years, and pay for the surveying of it. He knew he could get along all right the first year because the "Society" had promised to transport him and his family to his destination from Galveston, provide him with a house and supplies for the first year.

Christina was busy caring for the children and trying to answer their questions about the strange country. The society had underestimated the cost of transportation from Galveston and Indianola and across the country to Fredericksburg. It had also underestimated the cost of erecting the crude dwellings. Then, too, many more colonists came than were expected. To make bad matters worse the heavy winter rains set in and the roads were almost impassable. An epidemic broke out and many died before leaving Indianola.

After much delay at Indianola they finally started to New Braunfels in ox carts. After some delay they came on to Fredericksburg during the spring months. Because of the danger from attacks by the Indians they were to live

there on a ten-acre plot instead of Mr. Hoerster's allotment farther on in the wilderness.

Their ten-acre plot was located on what is now Highway No. 9. Once again there was a delay in building the crude but sturdy cabin. Finally they moved in and called it *Klein Frankreich* or "Little France." For ten years they lived there, raising corn and wheat which was ground into meal and flour for bread and to feed the cow and chickens. But, it was ten years of hardship and suffering. Prince Solms had incurred heavy debts. His successor, John O. Meusebach, an excellent manager, was not able to establish sufficient credits to provide relief. Food was scarce. In spite of careful management Von Meusebach was without funds, regular rations could not be distributed. Famine and disease were rampant. His appeals to the society for more funds were in vain. He finally succeeded in getting a letter published in Brennen, Germany, which brought a credit of \$60,000. This alleviated much of the distress.

Henry Hoerster was interested in raising cattle, so in 1856, ten years after their arrival in Fredericksburg, the Hoerstes, the Kothmanns and the Carters decided to move to Willow Creek in what was then Gillespie county. Two years later Mason county was organized and this community became a part of that county.

Christina Hoerster accepted the idea of moving farther into the wilderness with the same matchless courage, faith, patience and fortitude that she exhibited when her husband announced his decision to leave their home in Germany.

She had cared for her three little boys



This, the first home of the Henry Hoerster family in Mason county, is still standing.

and brought new babies into the world, sometimes with the help of a midwife and sometimes without even that aid. She had lived through ten years of privation and hardships, caring for her own children and helping to nurse the sick in the homes of her neighbors. There was something in the lullaby she sang to her children, something in the sublime simplicity of her teachings that, too, formed a bulwark of strength and courage for her husband, and instilled principles and ideals of the real things of life in her children that are discernible in her children's children today.

Then, too, the Hoerstes were not going alone. Their friends, the Jordans and Kothmanns, were going with them. Their homes would establish the new community on the upper Willow Creek. In October, 1856, the three families arrived at their destination after a three days journey in ox wagons over rough roads, the present community of Art. Twenty-four people in all made up this new community. Sturdy log cabins had been built. They were so scattered that in case of an Indian attack each family would have been completely cut off from the others. They relied upon their signal of distress, three pistol shots in rapid succession, for help from each other.

The Henry Hoerster house was built upon a slight elevation near upper Willow Creek. It contained three rooms and an attic. The hand-hewn logs were blocked together at the corners and the cracks were "chinked" with mud.

While Mrs. Hoerster was busy with her household tasks and keeping an ever watchful eye on the children, Mr. Hoerster devoted his time in preparation for the winter months. His first consideration was for his family. There was an abundance of wild game such as deer, wild hogs and turkey. Meal and flour could be ground in his mill as needed. But staples, such as sugar and coffee had to be bought from Fredericksburg or San Antonio. Money was scarce. "Live at Home" was practiced with rigid economy. Small patches of corn were raised in the valleys.

"Raise a bin of corn" was an essential with Henry Hoerster. "You can feed corn to the cows and they will make milk for the children to drink; you can feed it to the chickens and they will make eggs; you can grind corn into meal and make it into bread," he said. Cane was also raised to provide syrup. Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans and cabbage were grown in the garden. Kraut was made and put into big barrels and weighted down with rocks. Potatoes were stored for winter use by placing alternate layers of potatoes and sand in a hole or on a well-drained place then covered with fodder.

He liked to cure beef by cutting out big chunks of meats following the lines of the muscles from the hams and forequarters, rubbing the pieces of meat with

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salt, pepper and a little saltpeter. Then he would string the chunks of meat on a fodder twine and dip them into a pot of boiling water about a minute, until the outside was white. The natural juices were sealed. He again applied plenty of pepper and salt, hung the meat up and smoked it with hickory bark three or four days or until the outside was perfectly dry. He would then declare that it was ready to partake of as prescribed by the appetite and later by the doctor. The meat kept indefinitely. They ate it raw sometimes and sometimes heated it in hot butter.

His grandson, Sam Hoerster, who lives on the original tract of land still uses this recipe, although he puts his meat in the refrigerator. But, I am getting ahead of my story.

Henry Hoerster had his herd of long-horns. He used a long brand *H S T E R* that could not be changed. At first there was not much sale for the cattle so he had to plan something else for a cash income. People ate his cured beef and liked it. His cured hams and bacon were equally as good. The hogs were fattened on *post oak mast*, or acorns, which he

considered next to yellow corn for the production of meat of good flavor. So he raised more hogs, would butcher as many as 100 at one time. He sold loads of cured meat to the army posts at San Antonio and Fort McKavett. Another source of income was by hauling loads of whiskey, flour, sugar and Liverpool salt from San Antonio, Austin and Indianola to Fort McKavett and Fort Stockton in what would have otherwise been an empty wagon after having taken down a load of cured meat to the army post. He sometimes traded meat for staples—flour, sugar and coffee.

Mr. Hoerster and the older boys hauled freight from Indianola to the army posts. If the roads were bad they would be gone three months. If the trip to San Antonio and return was made in a month, they considered they had made good time.

But Henry Hoerster's greatest interest was in livestock. He marked the *razor-backs* and improved them by selecting the best male to breed to the best type female. His customers preferred thick bacon so his aim was to develop the grease-type hog. He had raised sheep in

Germany and wanted to raise them here on a larger scale but could not because of predatory animals. He did raise enough to supply the family with wool.

After the wool was scoured, Mrs. Hoerster and the girls carded it, spun thread, wove it into cloth and made all garments by hand. They were very busy cooking on the open fire place, carrying water from the creek, washing, ironing with crude equipment, the only kind available. But they had a home of their own! The boys were doing their share and would gradually establish themselves in the new country that was their home.

But, in 1859 the family was made sad by the death of the mother. Mr. Hoerster was left alone with his children.

About two years later he married Anna Gamenhaler, a native of Switzerland, who had come over with her parents. She loved Henry Hoerster's children and shared their joys and sorrows.

The Civil War came on and Fritz entered the Southern Army. The Indians continued to make raids, especially during the light of the moon. One day while Bill Hoerster, twelve years at the time, was guarding the horses, they stole the

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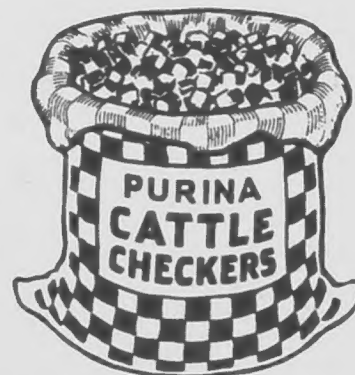


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Children of Sam Hoerster (insert) helped make the marvelous record of Mason county boys and girls in the show rings of the Southwest. At left, Hazel Hoerster, at the age of 11, and a calf she fed out. She used the sales receipts and other prize money as a college fund and is now a student at the Texas State College for Women at Denton. At right, Sam Hoerster, Jr., and his grand champion steer of the 1934 Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show. Sam, Jr., attended the Texas A. & M. College.

horses and captured him. The distracted family could find no trace of him until about a year later a friend of the Hoerster's living on the Plains of West Texas, learned that he was with a band of Indians nearby. He traded the Indians a horse for the "pale face boy" and brought him home to a grateful family.

The cattle did not bring much money at first. Henry Hoerster usually sold to local buyers. The great northern markets were not developed until after the close of the Civil War. Then Fritz and Bill, the cattlemen of the family, went "up the trail" with the Hoerster cattle.

As Mr. Hoerster grew older he continued to manage his business and his advice was sought by his boys on business matters. He was proud of them as citizens. They had taken advantage of the opportunity he had given them by bringing them into a new country.

Dan was the first cattle brand inspector for Mason county. His job was to inspect the herd to be sure there were no cattle that had not been bought and paid

for before it could leave the country. Unscrupulous men tried to buy him off. Henry Hoerster's heart swelled with pride because they could not buy his son off. Then they warned him they would kill and scalp him. One day he and his brother-in-law, Peter Jordan (he had married Minnie Jordan) were riding into Mason, when he was shot by a gang which lay in wait for him behind some buildings. He fell from his horse, fatally wounded. One of his companions, Henry Pluenneke, got off his horse and ran to him and dared the gunman to come and scalp Dan. One of the gang held up a red handkerchief and said, "Let's shoot it out through this." "You didn't give Dan Hoerster that chance," shouted Henry. Peter Jordan, unarmed ran into the hotel nearby to get a pistol and joined in the fight. But Dan Hoerster died. This occurred during the so called "Hoodoo War" which will be discussed another time. After the close of the Civil War the *carpet-baggers*, *scalawags* and other undesirable characters drifted into that country.

Proud of His Sons

When the Jordans, Kothmanns and Hoerstes settled on upper Willow Creek, the nearest post office was Hedwig Hill. When Anton Hoerster, another one of Henry Hoerster's sons, opened a store in the upper Willow community, a post office called Plehuerville was established. Anton bought produce from the citizens of the community and dealt in real estate. He borrowed money at a low rate of interest and loaned it at a higher rate of interest. One time he went to a home in a nearby town to borrow some money. After he had talked with the man and his wife a little while they decided he was honest. They pulled \$200 out of a shuck mattress and let him have it without a note.

"Yes, my son, Anton, he is honest," beamed Henry Hoerster, "His word is as good as his bond."

His younger boys were growing up and were being recognized as representative citizens, the daughters were marrying fine men.

His second wife, Anna, had passed

away. The children were married and had established homes of their own. Henry Hoerster had moved from his first home to one near the triple oak tree, just a short distance from the original home. His son, Henry, had a house in the same yard and continued to cut his meat on the board between the limbs of the oaks

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that had sheltered the Hoerstes for so long.

He was glad that his children had more conveniences. For one thing there was a doctor in Mason who could be called when needed, instead of having to depend upon home remedies. He had used phytoloca tea for colds; turpentine, coal-oil and and resin for cuts. Prickly pear poultices, enclosed in bags of hot salt or sand, had been good to draw out poison. In case of serious illness there had been good old Dr. Plueneke. He was a *homeopathic* who gave sugar pills, calomel and strychnine and sometimes belladonna. He studied the symptoms of the patient, then studied "the book" and prescribed according to his best judgment. In many cases it was probably a guess, but Henry Hoerster thought it was better than his guess.

At Easter the children enjoyed the beautiful eggs dyed with the red fluid just inside the "white spider-like cover" of the prickly pear. There had been the community singings and the preaching services, held at first in the homes before the church and school house had been built. Probably Christmas celebrations had been the gayest times. For days Mrs. Hoerster and the girls had been busy baking cakes, pies, puddings and other good food to last throughout Christmas week. Sugar was scarce. It was bought by the block, sliced off in small pieces

and given to the children as a treat. Friends usually ate dinner with them or they ate with a friend. After dinner the men folks pitched horseshoes, or talked politics and business. The women looked after the babies, exchanged ideas and recipes.

New Year's eve was another great occasion. The boys made the rounds of the nearby communities on what they called "a serenade" for the purpose of "shooting out the Old Year and drinking in the New Year." They would stop at each house awake the family by hollering and singing. The entire family got up and treated the boys to wine and cake. After talking to the girls they went on to the next place. Sometimes they were out all night. One night they failed to get the treat they thought they should have, so they left the old man's plow hanging in a tree.

But they knew they would get good wine at Henry Hoerster's. He made it himself by mashing grapes with a press made of a round piece of lumber about ten inches in diameter with a handle three or four feet long. A layer of grapes and a layer of sugar were placed in the barrel and pressed. When the juice arose it was placed in another barrel and more sugar added. It was good wine when it started fermenting. The more sugar it contained, the more "kick" it had. It was served to visitors at all times.

As long as he lived Mr. Hoerster watched with keen interest the efforts of his children and grandchildren to improve their cattle. Although his great-grandson, Sam, and great-granddaughter, Hazel, who have been reared on the old home place, have produced champion whitefaces, they have done so by his method of "breeding the best males to the best females to produce the desired characteristics."

Henry Hoerster passed away many years ago. Among his descendants are to be found prominent cattlemen and progressive farmers, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and economists. They are citizens who stand for the same principle he stood for—honesty, law, order and progress.

Ed Hoerster and John Hoerster of Mason are the only children of Henry Hoerster still living.

Good Sale By Banning-Lewis

BANNING-LEWIS RANCHES, Colorado Springs, Colo., sold 182 head of their Colorado Dominos at auction on November 4 for a total of \$38,532.50. The top price of \$1,500 was paid by Dinwiddie & Mason, Laramie, Wyo., for Colorado Domino F. 140th, a June yearling son of Colorado Domino 56th, while Albert Mitchell, Albert N. M., took Colorado Mischief F. 35th, a son of Mischief Mixer 5th, at \$1,175. Brook Hereford Ranch, Brady, obtained Colorado Domino F. 133d, a June yearling whose grandsires were Dandy Domino 2d and Dominator, at what looked like the bargain price of \$750. J. M. Carey & Bro., Cheyenne, Wyo., went to \$610 to get title to Colorado Mischief F. 50th.

The top 10 bulls averaged \$623.50 and the 42 head that went through the ring many of which were calves fresh from the range, returned \$328 per head, only four of them selling below \$200. The top 10 females, all of which were heifers and many of them weanlings without any fitting, and sold in groups, averaged \$313. The average on the top 50 head was \$330, while the entire offering of 182 head returned \$212 per head.

W. L. Allen, Littleton, Colo., took a large number of the choice females and Brook Hereford Ranch, Brady, obtained a select group of bred heifers, nine heifer calves and several of the best bulls. Monahan Cattle Co., Hyannis, Neb., Bob Hooper, Plainview, Texas; C. K. Ranch, Brookville, Kans.; W. O. Dennis, Porterville, Calif.; L. M. Bowling, Jefferson, Okla.; Schultz Hereford Ranch, Towner, N. D.; and J. P. Harmon, Louisville, Ill., were among the leading bidders.

The sale was handled by Colonels Thompson and Johnson and they were assisted by newspaper representatives.

"I enjoy 'The Cattleman' very much. . . I sure like the articles on horses and wish there were more of them, but on the whole it is a very well balanced magazine." Byrl McNeil, Route 1, Ellensburg, Wash.

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